

News Release

\$260,000.00 awarded to teach Horticulture online through UMC

By Richard Nelson on Thursday, November 3, 2005

The University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) in cooperation with Communicating for Agriculture (CA) has formed a partnership with a consortium of Minnesota based Agricultural and Agricultural related businesses to develop and deliver horticulture training online.

The \$260,000.00 project, awarded by the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership, is based upon an international agriculture exchange apprenticeship training program currently being offered through CA. UMC's contribution includes online course development and instruction that will operate through its Center for Adult Learning (CAL). CAL's mission is to facilitate access for a diverse community of adult learners within Minnesota and beyond by utilizing alternate delivery systems. UMC's proven track record in online course delivery and CA's apprenticeship program combined will expand that access.

UMC and CA will partner to create a domestic online version of a special horticulture program where Minnesota businesses and U.S. citizens will be able to benefit. A consortium of five businesses will be participating in the project. These businesses, from various parts of the state, will include those from both rural and urban settings and will be businesses engaged primarily in horticulture activity. The size of the contributing businesses will range from around 80 to several hundred individuals. Some of the firms have business operations in a number of locations. The companies in the project are Linder's Greenhouses & Garden Center, Gerten's Wholesale Nursery Center, Wagner's, Bergen's Greenhouses & Bailey Nurseries. The instruction for the project will include an apprenticeship, field instruction and e-learning all delivered through the collaboration of CA and UMC.

"The face of agriculture in Minnesota is changing," says Dr. Richard Nelson, UMC's Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs. While production agriculture focuses on raising crops and livestock still predominates, other types of specialty agriculture and agricultural related businesses are securing an ever-increasing niche in the industry. "This type of training available online and through apprenticeships will allow industry the ability to educate their employees and be able to keep up with changes in the workforce," Nelson said. The Horticulture industry is no longer just a seasonal operation," says CA's Steve Jones. Because of heavy investment in their greenhouse facilities can now operate (i.e. grow) products throughout the year.

Apprentices participating in the program would have a wide range of duties. They would learn all aspects of their business host operations. This would include operating equipment, dealing with customers, learning about vendors and their products, how the industry operates, besides the detailed technical skills that are necessary in doing their job. "I think it is a great idea to improve the quality of the workers in the green industry, another chance for them to receive professional development and to improve their working skills." We have partnered with CA in the past on similar programs and it has been a "win-win" situation for all of us," said Ivan Izzo, Linder's Greenhouses & Garden Center, Division Manager. Participants would have much needed and highly valued work experience they could put on their resume in addition to the apprenticeship certificate from a respected higher education institution.

Communicating for Agriculture is offered in all 50 states and in a wide range of foreign countries where it has successfully provided overseas training internships to over 10,000 foreign nationals and American students.

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